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## Migration and Religious Transnationalism: Recent Research and the Case of the Brazilians in Suriname

The Brazilians have the same problems  
here as they have in Brazil  
(Female member of Deus é Amor church  
in Paramaribo, Surinam, March 2004)

### 1. Introduction

In Latour, a working-class neighbourhood on the outskirts of Paramaribo, three Brazilian catholic priests run the parish. They are members of the *Congregação Missionária Redentorista* and arrived in Suriname in 2001 to replace the Dutch Redemptorist friars that had served the Surinamese Catholics for many decades. In Combé, another part of the capital of Surinam, there is a *Deus é Amor* (God is Love) church, founded in 1998 and there are now already six other groups formed, four congregations in the town or nearby, and two in the woods, at the *garimpos* Benzdorp and Vila Brasil respectively, all founded by Brazilian missionaries. There is also an *Assembléia de Deus* (Assembly of God) church, linked to the *Surinamese Gemeenten Gods* (Surinamese Communities of God), but with a Brazilian pastor. And finally there is a Baptist mission with Brazilian missionaries involved in it, as I was told.

Next to these religious people an unknown number of lay Brazilians is living in Paramaribo now, many of them in a part of the Tourtonne neighbourhood that is nicknamed Klein (i.e. small) Belem, or (in Portuguese) *Belenzinho*.<sup>1</sup> These Brazilians came to Suriname in a very recent flow of migration: In the past few years tens of thousands of Brazilians have come to Suriname, and to British and French

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<sup>1</sup> Belem is the capital of the Northern Brazilian state Pará, connected directly to Paramaribo through six flights weekly. Klein Belem is located at the Anamoustraat, in Tourtonne, Paramaribo-North.

Guyana. According to journalistic sources as many as 40.000 Brazilians have found a home in Suriname since 1995, although other commentators hold lower numbers, e.g. the vice-consul estimated that 20.000-30.000 Brazilians live in Surinam in 2005. The census of 2005 comes up with an estimation of almost 20.000 in the same year (Algemeen Bureau Voor De Statistiek 2006); in any case we are talking about a considerable population. Of these not even 3.000 were registered at the consulate in March 2004.<sup>2</sup> Many of these Brazilian migrants arrive as gold prospectors or are involved in related activities, such as commerce or prostitution, and start their trans-border life in the woods, but increasingly they are settling in the country's capital.

Throughout its history, Brazil has experienced an intense movement of internal migration, from the coastal zones to the interior states and from the northeastern countryside to the industrial urban areas in the Southeast. Millions of Brazilians moved in the past century, but they largely remained within the borders of the nation. Brazilians leaving the country only started to become large in numbers during the economic crisis of the 1980s. More than one million Brazilians lived outside the country in the 1990s, mainly in the USA, Japan and Paraguay.<sup>3</sup> The movement of people between Brazil and its neighbouring countries is quite stable, with Argentina both receiving and sending most migrants over the last decades (Hasenbalg/Frigerio 1999). A specific type of migration is the trans-border movement, in the Amazon region, a movement that is relatively invisible, and involves a constant come and go instead of a stream in one direction. It's invisibility results from the fact that it concerns manual workers and peasants, and in the case of Suriname *garimpeiros*, who don't have legal documents and who largely work outside the registered and monitored circuits of the urban centres. From the 1980s onward tens of thousands of Brazilians also migrated to French Guyana, to find a

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2 Interview ambassador and vice-consul, March 11, 2005.

3 Wilson Loria (1999) writes about 600,000 to one million Brazilians living in the U.S. alone. Major cities where there is a Brazilian agglomeration are Newark, New York, Miami, Boston, Framingham, Somerville, Los Angeles, Berkeley, and San Francisco. Beserra (2003: 6) mentions that almost 800.000 Brazilians live in the USA, 454.500 in Paraguay and 224.229 in Japan, according to Itamaraty.

living in the construction works related to the Kourou space centre. 30% of the Guyana population (total almost 200.000 2006) is Brazilian now (Arouck 2000; 2002) and in the other neighbouring country, Guyana, Brazilians are active in (diamond) mining too.

About the backgrounds of the Brazilian migrants in the Guyana's little is known so far. Given their occupations in the new country, they do not come from the affluent part of Brazilian population. Most of these migrants had little schooling and come from the poorer areas of Brazil, and many already migrated in Brazil before they moved to Surinam, British Guyana or French Guyana. According to several people 95% of the women migrants are from Belem, and 95% of the men from the state of Maranhão, but these numbers are not based on systematic research.<sup>4</sup> The vice-consul estimated that 90% of the Brazilian migrants come from northern Brazil, and 70% of these from rural Maranhão, where poverty is most severe.<sup>5</sup> Other sources state that the Brazilians come from Amapá mainly, where they already were engaged in gold mining (Hoogbergen et al. 2001). My observations and interviews with migrants confirm that most come from the Northern states: Pará and Maranhão, and in lesser numbers also Piauí, Tocantins, Amazonas.

The emigration of such large numbers of Brazilians turned our attention to the role of religion in the migration process. In Brazil religion takes such an important place in social and cultural life that the question arises as to what happens with the religious lives of transmigrants in the host countries. In Paramaribo the presence of Brazilian religion is visible and known by all in the form of the Pentecostal churches and the Catholic priests. But how is the involvement of the Brazilian migrants, the people who live in Paramaribo working in shops, restaurants, bars, nightclubs, and the prostitutes and *garimpeiros* who come to town from the woods periodically, in the available religious options? In this paper I will explore the interconnection between religion, migration and transnationalism. Starting from the available material on transnational migration – of Brazilians but not alone – we will attempt an overview of contemporary research into the

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4 Interview José Cardoso Neto, March 4, 2004. Cardoso is the president of the Cooperative of gold workers in Suriname (Cooperativa dos garimpeiros no Suriname – COGASUR).

5 Interview March 8, 2004.

transnational socio-religious field. I will use this overview then, to formulate some first analyses of the data I gathered with respect to the religious aspects of the lives of the Brazilians in Paramaribo, Surinam.

## **2. Transnationalism and Transnational Religion**

Scholars of transnationalism and transnational migration only recently started to pay attention to religion (although some authors have furnished interesting overviews of the field already; cf. Levitt 2001b; Vertovec 2000). Slowly it is being acknowledged that religion plays an important role in the organisation of migration, community building by migrants and all kinds of transnational links between home and host countries. In the research on transnationalism much more attention has been given to questions concerning the role of the nation-state, such as the redefinition of the boundaries, political organisation and the sending of remittances. But to understand transnational migration, the nation-state is no longer the correct entity. According to Vertovec (2000: 13) we should understand transnationalism as the

actual, ongoing exchanges of information, money and resources – as well as regular travel and communication – that members of a diaspora may undertake with others in the homeland or elsewhere within the globalised ethnic community.

As Margolis also rightly puts it (following Basch et al. 1994): “immigrants become transmigrants by constructing social fields that ignore geographic, political and cultural boundaries”, thus making the home and host society a single field for action (Margolis 1995: 29). Of course migration is only one form of transnationalism, and there are many other “cross-border” activities that deserve attention, such as – with respect to religion – missionary activities.

Contemporary study of migration uses the concept of transnationalism to emphasize the fluidity of space and place, the (imagined) communities created in the process, the permeability of borders, etc., concepts that express a shift from the ‘materialist economic’ focus to attention on the subjective experiences of migration (Lewellen 2002). Transnationalism then, is not so much a theory as a set of ideas and conceptual tools for analysis that are meant to do justice to the fluidity and movement involved. Some important aspects of analysis should be the rethinking of the ideas of space and place, and the power

processes involving identity politics connected to these notions (2002: 136-137). Olwig (2003) argues transnational migration also means that migrants not only maintain a personal connection with their home country, but also “are pushed back to the country they have left by the receiving country because they are categorized and perceived in this country in terms of their origins in another nation-state”. This origin marks them as different and in many countries (e.g. in the US, which recognizes dual citizenship), allows them to be active in two different nations-states. “The immigrants, in other words, are perceived to be transnational” (Olwig 2003: 68).

What does this mean for religion? It is safe to say that transnational religion takes place in a much larger context: economic, political, social and cultural. In a recent paper Levitt (2003) makes a useful distinction between transnational religion and the religious practices of transnational migrants. Transnational religion as it appears in scholarly texts has not so much to do with migration, but instead points to the ways in which world religions create a transnational civil society that challenges the nation (Rudolph/Piscatori 1997). In this context several authors have addressed questions of the pluralisation of religion in relation to globalizing relations between peoples (Peterson et al. 2001b). Others have pointed to the role of religion in migrant and diaspora communities (Brettell 2003; Levitt 2001a; 2003; Vertovec 2000).

The religious beliefs and practices of migrants, their local organisations and informal attachments to religious communities, the way they construct identities and notions of belonging within the religious context, are at another level of analysis and abstraction. The religious practices of transnational migrants are nevertheless often connected to transnational religion, “because transnational migration households, congregations and communities are sites where diasporic, global and transnational religions are created” (Levitt 2003: 849). The distinction is therefore mainly a question of focus; do we want to clarify the local community and the processes of identity formation, community organisation and religious meaning making? Or are we interested in the larger structures? In this paper I will concentrate on the first option.

Several authors have designed descriptions for the concepts used in this context. According to Schiller transnational religion refers to the religious practices, discursive and non-discursive, and the institu-

tional form of a religion, that are lived at different places, and in which the daily practice of both locations is part of the same social field. Religion is a social field just as kinship, friendship, business or politics, and the transnational social fields are the life world of the migrants that are part of daily life in two societies: their society of origin and their society of settlement (Levitt 2003; 2004; Menjívar 1999; 2000; Peterson et al. 2001a; 2001b; Vásquez/Marquardt 2003). Transnational religion thus makes it possible for individuals to have their religious lives across international borders.

It is not difficult to think of religion as an important element in immigrant communities. Religious institutions, international, have been important resources for migrant groups in which identities are reproduced and produced in new their environment, churches forming a basis enabling migrants to adapt to their new situation while maintaining the connection with their cultural background (Yang/Ebaugh 2001). Immigrants establish networks and relationships to survive in the new country, and regional and other identities clearly delineate groups and bring people together. Religious resources help migrants to adapt to the demands of the new society and answer to the challenges to survive in often very harsh circumstances. According to Guest (2003) religion is the principal organizer of the social networks Chinese immigrants create in New York and of utmost importance, because the religious communities – Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist or Daoist – are the main field for the mobilization of the social capital that these immigrants need to survive in the US.

Religion is particularly strong in constructing communities among adherents, offering security both connected to the world of God and gods, as to the here and now in the local group. In the case of migrant populations, the communities formed religiously easily include transnational links. The ties between the home community and the host community constructed through religion may be of various kinds and exist on various levels. They can be limited to individual and personal links of members of the religious groups, be they ordinary churchgoers or priests, pastors or other religious specialists. In her ethnography of the 'transnational villagers' between Miraflores and Boston, Levitt (Levitt/Peggy 2001c) shows how migrants use religion to produce links of belonging transnationally, and maintain double allegiances. The ties can also be institutional ties, established between

local groups in home and host communities. Especially when people from the same hometown or village form migrant communities, it is likely that such institutional ties are created. Levitt mentions financial and material support of US Catholic parishes for particular Dominican parishes and exchange programs for seminarians between the two countries Levitt (2001c: 167). But also without clear institutional links, religious groups may be mobilized as a support network with great symbolic importance (Sandoval 2002).

Religion may be primarily a local and localizing force in either home or host society, or in both. Levitt (2001c) asserts that Dominican Catholicism was largely a lay business until recently and therefore migrants are quite prepared to do things themselves. However, the Catholicism they knew in the Dominican Republic was very much connected to the territory in which it was lived out. Stripped of this territorial stage, it lost much of its validity in the new context in the host country USA. Therefore it is also logical that a special attraction may reside in the transnational character of many religious traditions. In its orientation to global and universal truths, religion may become a potent transnational force that makes sense in the new society without a direct reference to the home country.

A case in point is Roman Catholicism, which can be considered an old transnational system, one of the most international institutions in the world. It has been part of a translocal and transcultural project from the start, and uses largely the same symbols and rituals worldwide – making it easy for migrants to participate in the host community. There is a large recognition and this creates a feeling of home in the host context. For Catholics this makes it relatively easy to participate in the services in other places, even in other languages. They need not put in much effort. This can be convenient, especially when people do not have the desire to spend much time and energy in it. People who live their lives across borders, earning money in one place to send it to another place, might not be very motivated to get involved in church life altogether.

Simultaneously, the Roman Catholic Church spreads its universals and adapts them to local cultures, developing practices and experiences rooted in particular cultural contexts. Elsewhere, Mariz and I have discussed the contemporary tension between the “localizing” and “globalizing” elements for Brazilian lay groups (Mariz/Theije 2001;

see also Theije 2006a). In Brazil, as in other parts of the world, Catholicism to some extent also adopts localized appearances when it becomes the religion of the people. The representatives of the “official”, or institutional, Church use the expression *catolicismo popular* (popular Catholicism, or *religiosidade popular*, popular religion) for the result of the translation into local culture. Several researchers have reported that the same happens in the host countries where migrants adapt to or develop specific forms of Catholicism.

But other religions can rely on transnational networks too. In a very interesting comparison between Salvadoran street gangs and Pentecostal churches, Gómez/Vásquez (2001) show that in these Pentecostal churches the cross-border activities include the monitoring of the youngsters from the gangs and helping them into another life, in the US or in Salvador. Pentecostals build on many, horizontal networks of transnational churches. Catholicism, with its history of universal and global organisation and mission, seems to be paradoxically less transnational, according to Peterson/Vasquez (2001) in their research on Charismatic Salvadorans in El Salvador and in Washington, because in its organisation it emphasises the localisation of beliefs and practices. Of course there are transnational links, but these are the result of individual initiatives and not part of an institutional strategy.

Studies on migrants in North America show that religion is an important element in the reconfiguration of the migrants identity in the host society, also because US cultural policy promotes e sustains the religious expression of migrant groups (for example Hepner 2003 on migrants from Eritrea and Guest 2003 on Chinese migrants). Religion furnishes elements for the construction of a new identity, or is the main source for the maintenance of an identity linked to the home country. Religious identities and practices also enable migrants to sustain membership in multiple locations. In her study of Dominican migrants in the US, Levitt (2001a: 160) found that

membership in the religious organizational system linking Boston and the Dominican Republic allows individuals to move almost seamlessly between these two settings, thereby facilitating their continued involvement in their sending community at the same time that they are assimilating into the United States.



It goes without saying that in all these instances, religion can deeply influence the lives of migrants, and their relation to home and host community, religiously defined or not.

### **3. Brazilian Emigration and Religion**

Just as the eye for religion within migration studies in general is relatively new, so it is in studies on Brazilian migration. Quite some research has been done, but what do these works say with respect to religion? Migration of Brazilian citizens is best documented in the case of the US (Beserra 1998; 2003; Fleischer 2002; Margolis 1994; 1995; 1998; Martes 2000; Reis/Sales 1999; Ribeiro 1999; Sales 1999a; 1999b). In one case, that of the Brazilian city Governador Valadares, probably the best known case of an “emigrant town” religion might be the origin of the flux of people to the USA. In the 1930s and 1940s several missionaries settled and founded churches in Governador Valadares, that later would offer the possibility to the Brazilian converts to travel or move to the USA (Goza 2003: 269).

Sometimes religion can be seen as the main motivation for migration, as is the case with missionaries or when religious servants of the home community go to the host community to serve the religious needs of the migrants. Research among Brazilians in Los Angeles showed that the First Adventist Church of the Portuguese language is a very important organizer of migrant lives (Beserra 2003: 79-116). Beserra describes how in the case of these Brazilians in Los Angeles, their religious group functioned also as recruiting device, the core around which the social network of the migrant is constructed. In his study of Brazilian Nikkei in Japan, Linger (2001) found a missionary family of the *Assembléia de Deus* living in Toyota. The presence of the pastors of *Deus é Amor* in Paramaribo can be interpreted this way. Although missionaries often only stay for a limited number of years, they may open a route so to say that others can take afterwards.

In Argentina religion seems to play no significant role in the sociability of the Brazilian migrants (Hasenbalg/Frigerio 1999). Other research however, showed that churches are in fact the only institutional structures in the Brazilian immigrant community in New York (Margolis 1995) and Boston (Martes 1999; 2000). Research in the USA highlights religion as an important factor in the lives of the mi-

grants, not in the least because it is a chief provider of material and emotional support. It is not uncommon for churches to offer all kinds of services to the migrants, which is very important for many, especially those who recently arrived and don't speak the language nor know 'the way' to resolve practical problems, as was showed in the research of Alves/Ribeiro (2002) in Florida. Next to personal contacts, pure necessity of help and assistance attracts people to the Brazilian churches. Research in Los Angeles showed that the First Adventist Church forms the centre of a social network for migrants from Brazil (Beserra 2003). Alves/Ribeiro (2002) underscore the social security aspect of religion. They found that the churches offered many kinds of social help to the migrants, ranging from financial donations to offering housing – or at least a bed to sleep in. In the absence of civil organisations, consular services were even offered through one of the protestant churches. In fact, among Brazilians in the US religious groups appear to be the only existing institutions, as was shown in research in New York (Margolis 1994) and Boston (Martes 1999; 2000; Sales 1999a).<sup>6</sup>

Researchers repeatedly find a lack of organization among Brazilians in other countries. A lack of organization in the host country may point to the fact that these people are more oriented to their home country. Research in the USA also shows that Brazilian migrants develop less mutual help as compared to the Chinese migrant groups for example. Brazilians are more divided, to such an extent that Margolis (2003: 60) even speaks of "the discourse of Brazilians speaking ill of one another". Arouck (2000: 76) found in French Guyana that even the carnival parties were differentiated. He explains this difference by referring to class differences between the migrants, a suggestion that is also found in the work of (Resende 2003) who compares two neighbourhoods in Miami.

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6 Faist (2000) called attention to the political aspects of transnational spaces in which migrants move. With respect to the formation of transnational communities and what they call a "transnational public sphere", Levitt/Dehesa (2003) point to the fact that the policies that countries adopt to incorporate emigrant communities are important. In their research, they found that the Brazilian state is not very successful in constructing a space for civic engagement because it has a top-down approach in the policies it develops. This might contribute to the importance of religion in the Brazilian migrant communities.

The religious situation in societies of settlement is often quite different as compared to Brazil, but in most countries we find a religious field with as many options and as diverse as it is in Brazil. However, the circumstances of migrant life may also create other expectations and necessities as compared to the society of origin. This may make people chose adherence to other churches than to the home religious community. Research in the US showed that Brazilian migrants are more often members of evangelical churches than they are in Brazil (Martes 2000: 116). Furthermore, of this larger number of evangelicals, more are men as compared to the churches in Brazil (Alves/Ribeiro 2002: 68).

A last point of interest is language. In the process of organizing their own religious groups, language skills seem to play a mayor role. Thus in New York there is a Brazilian parish, with Portuguese language services that is very popular among the Brazilians (Margolis 1998: 89). However, a much-reported characteristic of the new local forms is that they are less connected to a specific local context, and in most cases also less to a specific people. In fact, it is reported that the Catholic Church in the US helps to create a meaningful social field for Hispanic migrants, regardless of the country where they come from, and including the Brazilians. The Church thus helps to “[...] shape migrants’ political relationship with the broader receiving context by encouraging [...] either a pan-Latino solidarity of resistance or a Hispanic multiculturalism” (Vásquez/Marquardt 2003: 166).

Several authors suggest that the transnational character of many religions may be attractive to migrants because they than feel they are a part of a larger group. The research of Levitt among migrants from Governador Valadares underscores the importance of a religious membership that is the key to an American-Brazilian identity (2003: 864). And this not only counts for the migrants in the societies of settlement. The non-migrants in Governador Valadares also are part of the transnational religious field, when they watch televised masses from Massachusetts to see their relatives on the screen (Levitt 2004: 1).

#### 4. Transnational Religion in Suriname

The Brazilian population in Suriname differs substantially from the migrant communities in the US or elsewhere. Most migrants work as *garimpeiros* and live in the forest, far away from urban Paramaribo, in small relatively isolated groups. Most men and women have no family in the *garimpo*, and the social ties in workforces are often unstable, people switch often from one work place to another and might travel at a regular base between the interior and Paramaribo or Brazil too. In Paramaribo part of the Brazilians have settled with their families, but most are singles who stay in town temporarily, between periods in the forest, or going to Brazil after a time of work, varying from several year to some months. The people who stay and work in Paramaribo prefer to go to Brazil on a regular basis also because they need to renew their visa. Others remain years in a row without legal documents, especially when they live in the *garimpo*. In some places small hamlets developed where bordellos are based, and where shops and bars sell food, drinks, clothing, and utensils for the work. These hamlets than become the centres for large areas in the forest where the independent workers extract the gold. The largest of these hamlets house several Pentecostal churches also.

The composition of the Brazilian population in Suriname, in the forest and in town, influences the religious activities they develop. First, there is a general lack of organization, of which possible representatives such as the priests, or the president of the association of *garimpeiros* complained. Several people suggested that this lack of organization is a consequence of the undocumented status of most migrants the country. Organizing would mean becoming more visible. Another explanation put forward is the supposed temperament of the *garimpeiros*; “they are like nomads” said the vice-consul, explaining they have other problems to deal with than to worry about their legal rights and documents for example (Theije 2006b). Under these circumstances, religion appears to be the only field where at least some kind of organisation is reached. This is not a surprise, as religion is an important factor in cultural, social and political life in Brazil, and the experience of Brazilian migrants in other countries shows that this pattern is followed elsewhere too. So, religion is a means of organisation in Suriname too, albeit of limited scope. Many migrants told me

they were not participating in religious affairs in Suriname, although they used to be practicing in Brazil. In this section I will discuss some characteristics of the religious practices of the Brazilians in Suriname: the available religious structure in the country, the problem of language, and the transnational religious elements.

Just like Brazil, Suriname is a religiously plural society. The population of less than half a million people is more or less equally divided between Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestant Christianity (the Evangelische Broedergemeente, the Herrnhutter community, is the largest group, but Pentecostal groups are growing) and Islam (Algemeen Bureau Voor De Statistiek 2006: 33). Apart from these 'world religions' many Surinamese are involved in Winti, an Afro-Surinamese cult that is especially popular among urban creoles. The religious institutions, structures and networks that the Brazilian immigrants encounter in Suriname are largely built from these ingredients. All of these religions with the exception of Winti have institutionalized practices but also know many informal elements. The catholic and protestant beliefs are similar to those in Brazil. Contrary to what maybe is expected Winti is quite different from Afro-Brazilian religions (due to the syncretism with a different Christian church). However, similar to the Brazilian situation there always seems to be place for new churches also. I will come to that in a moment. Let me first say something brief on each of the religions.

The Herrnhutter religion is the largest protestant church in the country. Although it is different from protestant and Pentecostal churches in Brazil, it attracted many Brazilian migrants that arrived in the 1980s and 1990s. However, several Brazilians who have lived for ten or fifteen years in Paramaribo said that after many years of being a member of the Evangelische Broedergemeente, lately they are participating in the Brazilian Pentecostal churches that were founded in Paramaribo since the end of the 1990s. The many Pentecostal churches that are available now, indeed attract most part of the Brazilians who develop religious activities, not only in town (where more options are available), but also in the larger *garimpos* in the forest, where they are the only churches present. Surinamese Catholicism has no parishes in the gold fields, but in town Catholicism is well organized. The Surinamese Catholic Church followed the policy for many years to minister to every ethnic group with clergy from the same

group. So for example they would have a Javanese priest for the Javanese Catholics, a Chinese priest for the Chinese Catholics, etc. As part of what is called the nationalistic policy this was changed some time ago (Vernooij 1998). From that time on, parishioners and priests would preferably no longer come from the same ethnic group. In a land of many languages and ethnic groups a recent result of this policy is that there are now Portuguese-speaking Brazilian priests in the Creole, Dutch and Sranantongo-speaking, neighbourhood Latour and Dutch-speaking Belgian priests in the Portuguese-speaking Brazilian neighbourhood Tourtonne.

For the Brazilians the fact that they do not speak the local language is an obstacle for their religious participation in Surinamese congregations. Catholics would attend in one of the parishes in Paramaribo where a weekly mass in Spanish was offered, which was the nearest to their mother tongue. Recently a Portuguese speaking nun and the Brazilian priests of Latour have started to organise a special Mass in Portuguese once or twice a month in Tourtonne. However, this is not a very structural solution, which can be seen as a sign that offering services to national communities is not a priority of the Surinamese Catholic church. The prevailing policy is directed to integration. Before they started in the parish, the Catholic priests spent several months in the Netherlands to learn Dutch, the official language in Surinam.

The policy of Pentecostalism with respect to language is the opposite. All Brazilian Pentecostal services are administered in Portuguese and the Pentecostal pastors do not speak Dutch or Sranantongo. Several Brazilians that had been living in Suriname for many years already and had become members of Surinamese churches are now attracted to the Portuguese language used in the churches and some have become members of the *Deus é Amor* community recently. Just like in Brazil the members of the Pentecostal churches are referred to as brothers and sisters, and in town as well as in the *garimpo* they were respected inhabitants. Even Brazilians that identified as Catholics would “visit” a Pentecostal church now and then. They did not convert, and did not consider themselves members of this church, but they liked the “praising God, pray, and hear the Word”. To find this

"I enter in any church", said *garimpeiro* Raflson.<sup>7</sup> And for this, the language is very important, more important than the religious tradition of the prayer or preaching. The mixture of different religious traditions that is so characteristic for Brazilian popular religiosity, finds an extra motivation in this situation of a migrant population that does not speak the language of the country it lives in. Interestingly, the Portuguese language services of the Deus é Amor church started to attract Surinamese people too, so that now there is simultaneous translation whenever there is someone available who has a command of Portuguese and Dutch or Sranantongo.

Both the Catholic priests and the Pentecostal pastors declare that the Brazilian population of Suriname comes to the churches because they have many problems and are looking for a spiritual consolation. Many health problems, poverty because the profits from the *garimpo* are declining, or because for some reason the person lost all he or she had, and for the rest all the same problems as they would have in Brazil, such as discordance in the family and worries in relation to relationships and love. Apart from religions' feature of offering security both connected to the world of God and gods, as to the here and now in the local group, the transnational character of many religions may be attractive to Brazilian migrants in Surinam. The local Catholic structure is of course part of the transnational and global network of Roman Catholicism, and of the Redemptorist religious order. As a global institution the Catholic Church aims at centralizing and controlling the practices and beliefs of its followers. At the same time, however, it has to give room for adaptation to the local context (Mariz/Theije 2001). In Surinam, with respect to Catholicism it appears to be a sign of the times that the Redemptorist congregation that almost founded and surely structured Catholicism in the country for almost a century substituted its Dutch missionaries for Brazilian friars recently. And this is not the only link between Brazilian and Surinamese Catholicism. The Sisters of Paramaribo also have connections in Brazil, and one of the Surinamese nuns who lived for many years in Brazil, is now a mediator and contact person for many Brazilians in trouble. In collaboration with the Brazilian friars she organizes a Por-

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7 Garimpeiro, 38 years old, working at concession Antino, interview February 2006.

tuguese language mass in Klein Belém every two weeks that is very successful. And she maintains an extensive network of help to Brazilians in trouble.

Transnational religious practices are one of the manners in which migrants maintain a connection to their homeland. The Brazilian Pentecostal churches in Suriname establish a very direct link, institutionalized in the person of pastors that come to work with the Brazilian community and conduct services in Portuguese. It is possible to reason the other way around also: because the Pentecostal churches 'follow' the migrants to new locations, in other countries, they become transnational religious organizations themselves.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, our main objective was to clarify the idea of transnational religion and its role in migration and transnationalism, based on literature and preliminary data on the case of Brazilian migrants in Surinam. Religion has an important impact on the way people experience their situation, create notions of belonging and identity, and the meaning people give to their everyday lives. It also offers many concrete tools for adaptation and social integration. Many religious organisations are global institutions, and this may facilitate the participation of the migrants – the religious rituals, symbols and organisation are known and familiar. This makes them a suitable field for migrants to seek forms of belonging and security in the often dangerous and insecure situation of the migrant existence. As transnational organisations, religious groups may also play the role of representing a group of believers, and become a player in the political field too.

The religious consequences of the recent migration of Brazilians to Suriname are not yet known; we still have to see whether these Brazilians establish a "Brazilian life" in Suriname or "creolize" into the Surinamese society. Transnational religion may play a role in either of these processes. By constructing social fields that are not limited by cultural, political and geographical boundaries, the Brazilians in Suriname might be engaged in the construction of a transmigrant identity, instead of referring to a Brazilian or creating a Surinamese identity. For the individual seeking religion the resources in Suriname the available resources are different from those in Brazil.



The Catholic Church does not make itself very present in Belenzinho, and still less in the interior where most of the migrants live. The Pentecostal church is much more visible, near to the Brazilian population both on various localities in Paramaribo town, but also the forest, which makes this church an important factor because of the availability of religiosity every day of the week. The migrants use both resources in many cases in an occasional way, without getting involved in a structured way in church life, based on individual choices that are isolated in time and place. The composition of the Brazilian population in Suriname makes the clients of the churches an extremely unstable group. Some live in the interior, spend some weeks in the city now and then during which they might seek religion; they go to a catholic Mass or visit the Pentecostal churches some times, but then they return to their work in the forest, where they may stay for months in a row before returning to Paramaribo. In such cases, the religious activities of the individual will not result in a close connection to a community of believers.

I did not find any specific links that Surinamese congregations could have with localized Brazilian parishes, which would justify the identification of transnational religions. The church *Deus é Amor* could be constructing connections between Pentecostal communities in the places of origin of the migrants, and Suriname; however, it is probably not so easy to happen because the Brazilian population in Paramaribo is so unstable. Furthermore, the migrants originate from many different places in Brazil. Not even the three Brazilian Catholic priests should be seen as representatives of Brazilian Catholicism, solely at the service of the Brazilian migrants. "That they are Brazilian is pure coincidence" he said Father Vernooij historian of religion and Redemptorist priest himself (personal communication, February 2004). And this makes sense, because they are not in the Brazilian neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the Catholic missionary practice can only confirm the transnational character of religion.

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